

# Planting Prayers and Growing Forests

*Hi! I'm Andrew Clarke.*

*A few years ago I painted a picture of an acorn. Today God is growing a forest.*

In the summer of 2015, Pastor Bob Winsor and I had an exchange of ideas. The end result has spread across Ontario, into the United States, and wherever the internet is accessed. In the simplicity of my Prayer Tree painting, others have discovered an approach to connecting with God and witnessing for Him that had previously eluded them; they've begun their own meaningful relationship with Him and with those who desperately need His grace.

## From Spiritual Desert to Meaning and Purpose

Back then, I had a problem with prayer and with God. I was praying, all right. I even had a prayer journal; six, in fact. Then I stopped all of them because I felt like a fake. I just wasn't connecting with Him. Why was I praying at all?

Then Pastor Bob invested in my life. He showed me I'm loved and valued by God. He guided my thoughts to understand Christ's mission is ongoing today, active in you and me. We can be rooted and grounded in Jesus, growing more and more like Him and reflecting His glory. This means everything to me.

"Then people will call them 'Oaks of Righteousness,' 'The Planting of the LORD,' in order to display His splendor" (Isa. 61:3, ISV).

Pastor Bob asked, "What medium would you use to make your communion with God meaningful?"

The answer was simple and immediate. "I'm an artist. I'd paint!"

In simple childlike trust, I went before God with four prayers and an acorn painting. And He did answer! At the same time, a spiritual acorn was placed in my heart, one that called me in turn to invest in others by letting them know I was praying for them. And these prayers I also gave to God.

To begin my painting, I chose a modest canvas, just 10" x 13" (25.4 cm x 33 cm). Then I realized I was limiting God by my small-minded choice. So, I went big! 20 ¼" x 32 ¼" (51.5 cm x 82 cm)! For each request, I paint a new leaf on the tree, in red, representing Christ's blood shed for all.



The painting is in a hinged double frame that swings open. Inside the frame, on the right side, I hang tags with names and prayer requests, and make notations as time goes on. This keeps my prayers always in mind, intentionally talking with God, and watching Him work out His purposes in each life. When a prayer is answered, I move the tag with its recorded answer to the left side, and gild its leaf in gold. This ensures I don't forget God's dealings, and gives me cause to thank Him.

Of all the answers I've received, the most precious is the answer to one of my original four prayers: for God's hand to be on Lauren and me, on our marriage. God asked me to make Him number one in my life; then He could bless us beyond

measure. I did, and He did. Today, inside my Prayer Tree painting, you will find my wedding ring wired on the Answered Prayers side of the frame.

## Worshipping God Through the Art of Conversation

When I painted that acorn and an oak tree began to materialize on the canvas, I was seeking a relationship with God: to learn of and from Him; and to have meaning and purpose in my life, both spiritually and temporally.

Sharing ideas is the key to building any relationship. Spending quality time together, showing kindness, expressing appreciation—essentially, gaining trust. Following this formula, I began building connections for and with God.

"[Our faces] show the bright glory of the Lord, as the Lord's Spirit makes us more and more like our glorious Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18, CEV).

This verse encouraged me to put a picture of my Prayer Tree painting on my iPhone; to use it as a non-confrontational way to talk with family, friends, clients, even strangers. I keep my eyes open for opportunities to build a connection of trust.

By trade, I'm a cabinet maker, so I'm often in clients' homes. If I see an exquisite piece of art, for example, I compliment their fine taste and mention I'm an artist also. I ask their permission to show them one of my paintings on my phone. This opens the door for sharing my Prayer Tree and its story and giving them reason to believe God is trustworthy.

Then I ask, "May I pray for you? May I add you to my Prayer Tree?"

I get their contact information. A week, a month, a year later, I remind them I'm praying for them. Writing it down helps me remember to be intentional

**Photo above:** Andrew's original painting of an acorn. **Photo right:** The Prayer Tree painting today with 87 gold "answered prayers" leaves to date and anticipated answered prayers already sketched in.



with God. I ask Him to shine on my tree, and to give an increase. I thank Him for blowing in my leaves and moving hearts.

There are four things I love about praying:

**1** My purpose: to glorify the God of heaven and earth; to lift Him up. Christianity at its finest creates a safe place to invite others to come and worship God.

**2** Customizing prayer: to make it beautiful. I started a Prayer Tree painting, I show people the picture of my Prayer Tree painting on my phone, thus creating a safe, non-confrontational way of lifting them up to Jesus.

**3** Being intentional: I pray with purpose and direction, intentionally investing in prayer time. Because I've written them down, I remember the prayers and say thank you when God answers in His chosen way. I look back and remember: this is where God has led in the past, and this has been His answer. I know as soon as I start praying, God is already working on the answers. This causes me to worship Him in thankfulness.

**4** Watching for the blessings: My understanding of God has gone from "I believe He can answer my prayer" to "I have faith God will answer my prayer because my journey says He will." This new understanding has strengthened

my faith in God and causes others to see and respond to this God who answers.

**God Is Growing a Forest**

God is true to His promise. He has opened the windows of heaven. He has poured out such a blessing, I've not had room to receive it (Mal. 3:10). Today there are numerous trees and of various mediums. God has blessed with a relationship movement to His glory beyond my dreams.

The process started with four prayers in the solitude of my closet. Over time, God answered, and I became excited. I've talked to others about my Prayer Tree painting and the newly answered prayer leaves God has given me. Some of them have become excited too and have started their own relation with God in a Prayer Tree style that is meaningful for them.

*June, from Michigan:* "When I think of witnessing, things like handing out tracts or going door-to-door or even offering the familiar 'What He's done for me' testimony as part of a bigger program just never felt right or authentic to me. Something relationship-based seems more in line with what we know of Jesus' approach to others."

*Theresa, from Oshawa, Ont.:* "I was so inspired by God's answer to my 'very big, very specific' prayer on Andrew's tree. I wanted to have my own Prayer Tree; to witness how God would bless those in my life the way He'd blessed me through Andrew's Prayer Tree. My tree is just two months old, but already I've grown in my walk with God. There are answers to prayers on my tree. When a prayer is answered, I sew a button on the canvas.

"My Prayer Tree painting includes verses of Scripture and roots—based on Paul's assurance, 'When Christ makes His home in your heart through faith, you will have deep roots and a strong foundation, and be able to comprehend the surpassing love of Christ that makes you complete!' (Eph. 3:16-19, paraphrased). My Prayer Tree painting has been a huge blessing. It holds me accountable. Every time I see it, I reflect on God's goodness and how great He is. Eventually I'll put it on display where it will be a conversation starter."

*Susan, from Tennessee:* "Actually, it was my son Boston



Inside the Prayer Tree painting. Ongoing prayer requests are on the right and answered prayers are on the left.



Andrew with his painting.



Eva's "ice breaker" Prayer Tree painting.

who inspired me to begin my own Prayer Tree. Boston had talked with his uncle Andrew about his painting, and a spark ignited in Boston's young heart. He created his Prayer Tree using felt and added a lamppost. 'Jesus is the light of the world,' Boston says.

"I'm a quilter; I create with fabric. I liken my unfinished quilt to an Ebenezer stone, a visual representation of prayers I'm currently praying, as well as answered prayers.

Though not finished, my quilt is on display. It's a conversation starter. I share how God has been with me; of answered prayers for healing, safety, relationships, kids struggling in school, and more."

**Eva, from Toronto, Ont.:** "Being connected with the Adventist and Muslim Relations Exchange, I saw the Prayer Tree as an ice breaker to open conversations with Muslims as well as to help church members grow in faith the way I have. In just six months, I have almost 100 'answered prayer' buttons on my Prayer Tree painting. Even though they all show God's blessings, the big white-and-green buttons are answers that gave special momentum

to my journey of faith. A red button reminds me of a blessing that I didn't really pray for. Some prayers God didn't answer the way I'd expected; I glue on a small white button for those.

"I have a friend who wants to start one with her children, and her sister is very excited to create one of her own. In my church I know at least one other person who has a Prayer Tree."

spread the Good News—there is a God who is faithful to His promises, One who can be trusted.

The website, MyPrayerTree.com, has been created. I am asking God for a smartphone app developer, a script writer, and a videographer. I'm claiming His promise, "In the last days," God says, "I will pour out My Spirit upon all people. ... Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams" (Acts 2:17, NLT). ■

**The Future**

In a meaningful way, this painting encouraged a connection between God and me. Where will a Prayer Tree take root next? Only God sees the global picture. The Prayer Tree movement will

*Andrew Clarke shared his story with Sharon Okimi, a freelance writer. Andrew is available to consult with individuals or groups interested in this way of making meaningful connections with and for God. Contact info@MyPrayerTree.com.*



Susan's fabric Prayer Tree quilt.



Boston's "Jesus is the Light of the world" felt Prayer Tree.



Theresa's scripture Prayer Tree painting.

